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ABSTRACT

This paper states the basic assumptions underlying the philosophy and methods used in a parent-infant education program at the Parent Child Development Center in New Orleans designed to teach and emphasize all aspects of a child's development. The assumptions discussed in relation to program content are: (1) some parents have child-rearing styles which negatively influence some aspect of their child's development; (2) parents need a general base of child-rearing information in order to make informed choices about their own practices; (3) parents who understand underlying principles of human development will be more likely to use these forces to support growth and learning; and (4) adults and children learn best in a supportive, self-respecting relationship with others. Methods of teaching parents include the observation of models of adult-child interaction styles, and parent participation in discussions and demonstrations on the management of children in a variety of situations. The program emphasizes the parent's language and vocabulary development to help the parent become more independent in seeking child development information. (For related document, see PS 006 733.) (ST)

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THE NEW ORLEANS MODEL FOR PARENT-INFANT EDUCATION

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THE NEW ORLEANS MODEL FOR PARENT-INFANT EDUCATION

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Anyone who has been involved in thinking through and organizing curriculum will understand the dilemma we were faced with when we set about our curriculum building. One is forced to make assumptions about the human organism and how it learns. What should be induced? What should be omitted? What content, attitudes and values are most important? Any educational program makes many assumptions that are usually subtle or even unknown to the teachers who implement them.

Unfortunately, during the past ten years, volumes of research information in child development have been accumulated, but little information has accumulated in regards to educating parents. Should parent teaching sessions be activity based, for instance, demonstrating the development of object permanence or imitation? Or should they offer more general child development information such as feeding, child management, family health and family relationships? Should there be teaching sessions at all? Perhaps the "Educator" and mother should simply chat informally with no specific content in mind.

It has already been stated that the purpose of the New Orleans P.C.D.C. program is to collect data regarding the issues above. For this reason, it becomes very important that the philosophy and goals of the program be articulated. Even though the selected approach may be in error, at least important information will have been contributed

and the "science" of human education can progress. There are several infant and/or infant-parent education programs being implemented across the country. It is important to distinguish the important characteristics and assumptions about each model. "Operational definitions" of the parent education model allows persons interested in replication an opportunity to select models from models that seem in keeping with their own goals. Pooling such experiences allows selection of methods that seem most effective for accomplishing a particular set of goals.

In the operation of a program, hundreds of assumptions are automatically implemented daily. It would be a tedious task indeed to attempt to isolate all variables and all assumptions. However, the more articulated the philosophy, the more likely it is to be implemented. It serves as a frame of reference for decision-making in terms of staff organization, staff training, even staff hiring, and the choices of teaching materials and specific content. This becomes the second reason a statement of philosophy is necessary.

The assumptions for our Parent-Infant Education program are divided into categories, those dealing with philosophy of parent education and those related to methods of parent education.

ASSUMPTIONS RELATING TO CONTENT

1. Some parents have styles which negatively influence their child's development or a particular aspect of his development. The role of

the educator is to help parents gain an understanding of how certain childrearing practices can hinder the child's development. Although the reason the P.C.D.C. was conceptualized and funded for this purpose, there is continual debate about the role of educational programs planned for the cultural minority. This debate began on whether or not language programs for preschool children should be a difference or deficit model and extends to the fear that the middle class psychologist will impose his values of childrearing on parents who have different values and cultural communities.

We feel that children need certain environmental contingencies in order to reach optimal development, physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. Our purpose is to teach parents how to identify these important contingencies and help them organize their environment in order to provide them if they want to. This type of information has been available to some parents for years in the form of college child development courses, parent education, toddler preschool programs, and of course, personal counseling. For example, cooperative nursery schools, developed for parent education, numbered five thousand in 1967.[1] Many Y.W.C.A.s have sponsored courses in "The New Baby" for fifteen years. Both of these programs have been primarily available only to middle class and upper class parents.

[1]Katherine Whiteside Taylor, Parents and Children Learn Together. Ohio: Columbia University Press. 1968.

In this respect, we feel our role is an active rather than passive one. Here is an example. Our staff viewed a video session of another infant program. It showed a mother and teacher in a discussion while the young infant, perhaps four months, sat hunched in a walker. Our staff asked if the teacher would include discussion of using the walker. The reply was that the teacher would not, that the teacher's role was to interfere as little as possible in the mother's own parenting style, so as to insure the mother's self-confidence and the preservation of her style and culture.

In contrast, the role of our P.C.D.C. educator is to actively demonstrate the relationships between present parenting and the child's later development. About every six weeks; our curriculum includes a discussion of motor development and ways of optimally stimulating that development. A discussion focused on use of walkers (pros and cons concerning what ages benefit best from walker-type practice; amount of time felt to be optimal, etc.) is included.

Here is another example. Most parents want their infants to be able to manage a spoon as soon as possible, "to do things for himself." However, some mothers cut the nipple larger and larger until, at nine months, the child is still taking solids exclusively from a bottle. The outcome is obvious. At eleven months, this child cannot handle a spoon. Veronica practically feeds herself at eleven months because her mother started feeding her gradually and allowed her to get more cereal on the bib and the mother's dress than down her

gullet. The first child is nagged by her mother, "Look at Veronica. She can feed herself. How come you can't do that? You're just lazy."

Should the educator evade the topic of feeding since it is so closely related to cultural practices and values? We believe - certainly not. The educator's role is to help parents gain an understanding of how daily management can aid or hinder development toward her own goal. This type of reflection process is one of the important purposes of the New Orleans Model for Parent Education. We do, however, attempt to provide this type of information through video and films of contrasting feeding patterns over a long period of time, rather than the educator simply telling the mother "how to do it" - so it does indeed become the mother's choice.

Here is another example. Both the parent and educator hope for a clever, functioning, bright child who can cope with elementary school to good advantage. However, at age three months, the mother feels the child should be exposed to lots of noise. She keeps the television and radio on all day so her infant can get used to noise and be able to sleep through noise without being distressed. Of course, the infant does sleep well even at our busy center. The mother is very proud of her child, but the educator is concerned that if the child is not provided relevant stimuli, she may "tune out" the relevant sounds she needs in order to develop language. The educator attempts to work from the long range goal that both she and the mother have in common - involving the mother in learning about the

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process of language development. However, with language development, which is accumulative and yields results only after several years, it is often difficult for the mother to believe that such a cause-effect relationship exists. The educator's task is complicated and difficult. (This will be discussed later in this paper).

2. Parents need a general base of child-rearing information in order to make informed choices about their own practices. Most parents make choices about child rearing based on their family experiences plus the knowledge and information they have accumulated. The parents in our program are no different in this respect. The more knowledge a parent has, the more informed his choices can be. They do, however, often have less exposure to different points of view about child rearing. Thus, our first goal is to give knowledge and the skills that relate to that knowledge.

We believe that educators should respect the choices and decisions parents make in relation to their children; it is the right of parents to have that choice. At the same time, the educator can present a different point of view and can illustrate, for example, that punishing a child for toilet accidents doesn't necessarily lead to more independently trained children, while it may indeed lead to other negative aspects of development. An assumption often made by the reader at this point, and sometimes by the teacher, is that to present a different point of view means that the educator tells the mother "what to do and what not to do." This is not inherent in this assumption, as will be discussed later under the methods' section.

We believe that this attempt to teach and emphasize all aspects of the child's development is one of the more unique aspects of our program. If one thinks of such well-known programs as the Ypsilanti Demonstration Infant Project, the Ira Gordon Program for Early Intellectual Development and the Phyllis Levenstein Toy Demonstration Project, one can easily contrast the content. The New Orleans Model places a great deal of emphasis on relationships, management and ego development. For example, our model includes topics such as fear, separation, crying and its development into language, as well as the more popular cognitive stimulation topics. We also present toilet training even in the infant program. We have had two mothers thus far who have begun toilet training prior to four months of age.

Dealing with broader child development based curriculum is a great deal more difficult, in our estimation, than a demonstration with a mother and child to teach the child to watch for a falling object or a discussion of how a toy can facilitate learning new words. Anyone who has tried to work with child-rearing techniques and styles on a long range basis recognizes the complexity of the task we have set for ourselves in the New Orleans Model. However, we feel if the child is to have a sustained family support for his growth and development, changes in parent attitudes and techniques must occur. It may take longer for parents to take on new parenting styles than for them to provide play activities with the child, but hopefully once the parent's focus has been revised to a child center approach, this will bring about sustained and long range results.

However, we may well have tackled an impossible task - that of attempting to teach everything in parenting and consequently teach nothing well. If our model is not successful, we will have to examine this assumption carefully. The important task at this point is to state the assumption as carefully as possible, set about the job of parent education and try to find the answers to these and other important questions.

3. Parents who understand underlying principles of human development, such as the role of reinforcement, curiosity and imitation, trust and attachment in learning, will be more likely to use these forces to support growth and learning. The previous assumptions define wide parameters for the content, and these assumptions relate to depth and complexity of the content. We feel that our content must go beyond guides, advice such as that seen in many leaflets and pamphlets on parenting. Our content must speak to the issues of how children learn. Often little pieces of advice and information are given to parents without their being related to the basic psychological forces of human development.

The New Orleans Model makes a conscious effort to teach and use psychological statements as they are derived from Piaget's theory and social learning theory. (References are made elsewhere as to the relevant theories and literature). It is felt that parents who understand

and manage these forces have the basic information necessary for appreciating behavior and developing their own formulas and generalizations for effectively managing and controlling behavior, no matter what age the child. In other words, if a parent appreciates curiosity as an innate drive that leads to survival and learning, rather than innate evil which must be punished, hopefully, he will be more motivated to find ways of dealing with curiosity constructively. Similarly, she may look for boredom or lack of reinforcement as causes of misbehavior (even in her older children) and attempt to change these conditions.

This experimental approach regarding depth of content is another unique aspect of the New Orleans Model. Are such presentations really necessary? Are they too confusing and difficult? Are parents overwhelmed and bewildered to the extent that they cling to old ways and don't feel confident trying new information and techniques? Or are they more confident because they can analyze behavior and no longer have to depend on the educator or teacher to "give advice"? These are questions that will be asked (and hopefully answered) by the New Orleans Model during the next few years.

4. Adults (and children also, for that matter) learn best in a supportive, self-respecting relationship with others. This assumption relates to both content and method because it implies that the relationship and identification between the educator and parent is more important than the content. Approaches across the country

range from total emphasis on content to total emphasis on the relationship with no content. Finding the balance is the most important aspect of any parent education program and probably the one we (psychologists, educators, etc.) know least about. It is very difficult to train educational staff to deal with child-rearing topics with the delicacy they deserve. It is not clear that professionals can deal with these topics as delicately as they deserve either. We certainly are all short of the ideal in our daily interactions with parents. Educators and sometimes supervisors are frequently critical of a parent's way of doing things, even though our stated focus is to do nothing that will alienate the mother or cause a strain in the relationship. It may not be possible for an educator to maintain a giving, mutually respectful relationship with a parent, while at the same time giving new information that is in conflict with the parent's present child-caring styles. After all, how a person cares for his children is a reflection of his culture, his values and is often a balloon that carefully surrounds his ego.

I am sure the reader will be interested in following our program through these difficult years while we are making an effort to establish the important balance between the educator-parent relationship and the content that it must also embrace. If we can develop prospective and insight with the New Orleans Model, then we will have indeed made a contribution to the field of parent education.

ASSUMPTIONS RELATING TO METHODS OF PARENT EDUCATION

1. The P.C.D.C. curriculum for parents includes all the experiences the parent has that are associated with the center. Every experience the parent has effects her behavior, attitudes and understanding in a positive or negative direction. Although the complexities and intricacies of "running a store" hinder us from implementing the idea, we recognize and concentrate our energies toward dealing with and controlling as much as possible the parent's total experience in the center, which is our definition of the parent education curriculum. In other words, importance must be given to whether the building is always hot or uncomfortable, whether the transportation drivers and home visitors are punctual, the informal greetings and remarks spoken directly or overheard by the parents and the preparation of the building. All of these things influence the mother's perception of herself and her child. In many cases, these seemingly unimportant incidents may well outweigh the formal teaching in terms of influencing the mother's self-esteem and self-confidence.

By developing a system for describing, monitoring and controlling the mothers' experiences related to the center, we hope to be able to establish their relative influence, in terms of the mothers' learning. These measures are discussed elsewhere as process measures.

2. Parents learn through observing models of adult-child interaction styles. Modeling is the most powerful tool available for changing

techniques and attitudes. Social learning theorists report that persons observing a model usually take on "chunks" of behavior segments in entirety, rather than discrete, independent responses. The New Orleans Model includes both formal modeling in teaching sessions and informal modeling throughout the building. Educators model attitudes and practices in child care throughout the day that they hope mothers will imitate. For example, household pots and pans are kept on low shelves for crawling, exploring infants. Homemade mobiles hang over cribs; toy pockets are attached to sides of cribs. The child's daily program is planned around particular activities we wish to demonstrate for parents. For example, if feeding is the topic for discussion, parents observe and participate in the child's regular feeding activities. Observations have been developed to observe educational staff for the identical caretaking behaviors that home observers look for in mother's behavior.

Care is provided for siblings as well as target children. Theoretically, there were no funds available for this care; yet, it was felt that model caretaking must be available to these children as well as target children. If, indeed, an hourly untrained babysitter were hired, it is very likely that she may show child management techniques that are in conflict with those taught in parent education sessions. In such cases, the parents would be more likely to imitate the more familiar techniques as spanking and scolding, instead of the newer.

Our formal modeling takes place as we demonstrate activities with the infant; then the mother is asked to imitate the model. Demonstrations such as reading books to children and allowing them to handle books, etc., are carried out; then parents are asked to work with their own child in this activity. The educator works individually with the mother to expand and reinforce her techniques. Parents often view themselves on the video in such demonstrations. The educator keeps records of the parents participation in the demonstration-modeling situations. In the future, it is hoped video tapes of parent models, coping with children in their own home can be developed.

3. Parents who have participated in discussing and demonstrations on management of children in a variety of situations will be better able to cope with similar situations in their own daily interaction with their children. It is felt that the more realistic the management and caretaking situation is portrayed, the more likely the mother will be able to duplicate that behavior. For example, in our program, parents actually bathe, diaper and feed infants. The emphasis is more on interaction with infant and language modeling rather than techniques. They role play parental reactions in such situations as a young toddler who turned over the mop bucket when his mother went to answer the telephone. (See Ledet & Rabinowitz). They use their own children to illustrate positive management situations such as how to prepare a child for separation (going out); they role play negative (or punitive) management situations.

It is one accomplishment to enable parents to sit and play a game with a child which teaches him object permanence or space relationships, and quite another to aid her in dealing with a caged lion cub on the move.....toward the telephone, the television, the chest of drawers or the toilet. During each learning emphasis, great care is taken to provide experiences which approximate as closely as possible the mother's own home situation. During subsequent discussions on curiosity and language, the reader will see how the parents go to the grocery store with their youngsters (infant plus siblings) to help her learn to manage a realistic shopping situation.

Intellectual (knowing what to do) and emotional, practical control are two different matters. Any parent who has an active infant or toddler has lost his cool on more than one occasion. Rehearsal of situations that are likely to occur is more likely to enable the mother to cope with them calmly and constructively.

The practical type approach to dealing with child behavior has long been the focus of many parent education programs for preschool children and their parents.

With infant programs, however, this type of emphasis is often forfeited for an emphasis on activities and games that foster intellectual development. Our model attempts to incorporate cognitive activities into daily caretaking situations. The extent to which we are creative in doing this will perhaps be the extent to which we can be effective in enabling parents to provide optimal learning environments for their young children.

4. Adults learn through experience, repetition and practice. Adults, like children, learn through doing. It is the role of the educator to provide this repetition and practice in a variety of ways so the parent will remain involved and interested. If there is some dramatic, magic presentation that will immediately cause self-insights and new convictions, we have not yet discovered it. Rather, we believe that human beings learn from consistent information being offered in a variety of ways and enabling them to actively participate, such as making toys, talking with their infants, writing songs and poems, playing television quiz show games and taking field trips and shopping trips.

Visitors are often surprised at how simple and repetitious our parent education lessons are. For example, in the series on language development, first a teacher role-played going to the grocery store in the classroom, with grocery cart, infant, groceries, etc., while parents used an observation sheet of responses to look for. Parents and educators than went to the store with infant and siblings; the educator took slides that were shown at the next session. Mothers discussed observation of their own infant and then discussed other places they could use as learning situations for their infants and toddlers. This took about four sessions or two weeks.

Some of the techniques and methods we have tried have been uninteresting to parents. Both teachers and parents evaluate the activities and they rate the activities they liked most. Hopefully, this type of information will be helpful to others who are making decisions about parent education activities.

One of the most successful ways of providing practice has been role-play; our most successful way of providing repetition of content has been through crossword puzzles, television quiz type games, and other related activities.

5. As a parent's language and vocabulary develops, the parent will become more independent in seeking child development information on her own. We believe that the more capable the parent is, in terms of the written materials, the more articulate she becomes about child behavior; the more equipped she will be to seek information independently from reading magazines, talking with her pediatrician, etc. Our goal is to begin at a very simple level and, over the three-year period, gradually enable parents to increase their language skills. Within our model, we use written materials for this purpose. The infant response sheets, for example, the poems, puzzles, cartoons, crossword games, are all ways we work with the written word. The educator is the interpreter; we do not expect mothers to read the materials or use them alone in the beginning. The educator will ask her to look over, perhaps, a cartoon; they will talk about it when the mother returns. If one scans our materials, one will find that the mother's task moves from circling responses during the first two months, to filling in a few blanks in six months. By the second year, the mother pretends she is a reporter and gives a running (short) account of the child's activities. Still, the educator works side by side with the mother; her level of expectation depends on the mother's skill level.

We also play language games, specifically designed to increase the mother's vocabulary. The mothers are aware of the purpose of them; they enjoy them and ask to play them more often. During the second half of the first year, parents begin to prepare presentations. They report in their small group by reading short articles or paragraphs. They like to learn new words like "reinforcement" and "curiosity," "auditory," etc., and have heard them used on television or from their pediatrician since they are acquainted with them.

This attempt to integrate general vocabulary and reading enrichment into the child development materials is a unique aspect of our materials. Some programs develop reading materials for parents but they are usually written at the same level throughout; they do not represent a gradually increased level of difficulty, over the length of enrollment in the program. Our materials are certainly not refined in this respect. We believe this approach to be exciting but we have certainly not exploited all possibilities, in terms of presentation; we have some materials that are too difficult; some that are perhaps too easy. We have not evaluated the materials closely enough in this respect. Some have not been revised even though staff have evaluated them. We are aware that presenting the wrong written materials in the wrong way could negatively influence the mothers' response to the information it contains. We do feel, however, that if our program goal is to enable parents to function independently in their community, then this is a necessary part of their preparations and experiences with us. We do hope, as we are able to continue to prepare and revise materials, that we will have materials that will be useful to other programs which are also interested in upgrading general education skills.

The New Orleans Model for Parent-Infant Education is complex, as are most learning situations for adults. The model attempts to accomodate individual personalities and levels of competences, at the same time, promoting a productive group interchange.

The assumptions are stated with the full knowledge that they may be inadequate or totally in error. However, they represent our best experiences and knowledges at this time. They are our frame of reference, our beliefs, our philosophy. They will certainly be revised as we become more sensitive to our task and more skilled at recognizing our shortcomings. Nonetheless, we hope it will be helpful to other psychologists and educators to share them at this time.

Several references have been made to program monitoring in the previous discussion. This is certainly an important aspect of implementing any program. We must be certain that the stated philosophy is indeed implemented. A discussion of "Monitoring the Model" (to be developed) will present these issues in a later section.